

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING
CASS COUNTY JOINT WATER RESOURCE DISTRICT
GOVERNORS' CONFERENCE CENTER
CASSELTON, NORTH DAKOTA
JANUARY 6, 2016

The Cass County Joint Water Resource District met on Wednesday, January 6, 2016, at 1:30 p.m. at the Governors' Conference Center, Casselton, North Dakota.

Present were Dan Jacobson, Southeast Cass Water Resource District; Jurgen Suhr, Maple River Water Resource District; Ken Loughheed; North Cass Water Resource District; William A. Hejl and Richard Sundberg, Rush River Water Resource District; Carol Harbeke Lewis, Secretary-Treasurer; Michelle Anderson, Administrative Assistant; Mike Opat, Engineer for the Board; Pat Downs, Moore Engineering, Inc.; Shanna Braun, Barr Engineering Company; Randy Gjestvang, Red River Retention Authority and State Water Commission; Christi Fischer, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Pat McQueary and Patsy Crooke, Corps of Engineers; Jason Benson, Cass County Engineer; and those whose names appear on the attached roster.

Rush River Watershed

William Hejl welcomed everyone and introduced the Rush River Water Resource District board members and staff, Rush River Watershed Planning Team (Team), advisory and partner agency representatives, and consultants in attendance. Mr. Hejl stated the Cass County Joint Water Resource District is the sponsoring local organization and said the purpose of the meeting is to gain input from those in the Rush River Watershed to help develop flood damage reduction projects.

Pat Downs gave a presentation and explained the Rush River Watershed has experienced repetitive flooding, including 4 historic floods in the past 9 years. Numerous pictures were shown of the effects overland flooding has had on transportation in rural areas, making roads impassable at times, washing out roads and bridges, stranding homeowners, delayed planting, crop loss, field erosion and stream bank erosion.

The Cass County Highway Department spent a total of approximately \$10 Million on road and bridge repairs from 2009 through 2011, due to flooding. Specific damage areas were demonstrated on the 2009-2011 Bridge/Road Data map for Rush River Watershed. Mr. Downs provided a brief review of damage areas and comments submitted through the public meetings held in April and June of 2014, but stated all options are now open for discussion.

The Rush River Watershed Planning Team will be following the NRCS planning process to develop potential flood risk reduction measures in the watershed. Funding will be available through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to assist with the cost of the Small Watershed Planning Process (PL-566).

Mr. Downs briefly reviewed the role of the Team meetings. The first step in the planning process is to establish a purpose and need for watershed planning solutions within the Rush River Watershed. Mr. Downs presented and reviewed the NRCS concerns. A *Public Comment Form* was distributed for property owners and communities to rank concerns and list watershed goals. Mr. Downs explained the critical need for those living in the Rush River Watershed to list and rank their concerns for potential flood risk reduction measures. The concerns and comments will be reviewed by the Team to help establish the purpose and need for potential action.

Patsy Crooke briefly explained the Corps of Engineers is a cooperating agency. Mr. Downs explained as potential solutions are narrowed down, the agencies may address specific concerns on specific areas within the watersheds.

A draft purpose and need statement was presented to initiate ideas for possible considerations and potential goals in the Rush River Watershed. A few of the objectives included:

- Reducing flood impacts to roads, bridges, and culverts;
- Reducing agricultural crop losses, field erosion, and delayed planting;
- The ability to implement, manage and accomplish a project;
- Improving infiltration rates on land; and
- Reducing the 100-year flood impact.

Once established, the purpose and need statement will be submitted to the NRCS. Public meetings will be held at the end of 2017 or early 2018. Team meetings will continue and reports will be given at monthly Cass County Water Resource District meetings. Mr. Downs encouraged anyone interested to sign-up on the Cass County website to receive meeting notices and updates. A draft of the final watershed plan will be submitted to the NRCS by 2018.

Mr. Downs and Mr. Opat thanked everyone for their participation and asked that concerns and watershed goals be ranked on the forms and submitted within a week. Mr. Opat stated it is important concerns and issues are expressed at the beginning of the project development timeline. Comments will be reviewed by the Team on January 12, 2016.

For reference and to initiate discussion, Mr. Opat once again presented the Rush River Watershed 2009-2011 Bridge/Road Data map showing specific damage areas. Mr. Downs stated the maps handed out can be marked up and used to show individual property or community concerns along with the *Public Comment Form*.

Discussion was held and questions were raised on the June 20 and June 25, 2013, summer storm events, which according to the Farm Service Agency, resulted in crop damage and loss of \$19 million. Someone stated the events could have included hail damage; therefore, it is not a reasonable justification for flood damage reduction projects.

Shanna Braun and Christi Fischer answered questions regarding the NRCS scoping procedure.

A meeting participant asked about the reference material given out at previous meetings. Mr. Downs stated they may be useful as reference material, but may not be relevant, depending on the purpose and need statement.

Someone stated there is a 24-foot elevation difference from one end of the Rush River Watershed to the other. He said there are very few places in the Rush River Watershed where anything can be done to help develop flood damage reduction projects that would benefit the property owners and maintain wildlife. From visiting with people along the Rush River, few want or feel the need for flood damage reduction projects.

It was asked if the Metro Flood Diversion Project is going to be built. Mr. Downs said although not relevant to this discussion, the Metro Flood Diversion Project is on-going.

Concerns in the area where the Rush River enters the Sheyenne River were discussed. Someone in attendance said they had seen the Rush River has run backwards during times of high water. Consultants pointed out that construction of the Metro Flood Diversion Project would eliminate the stacking of water that presently occurs in that area.

Many meeting participants were concerned about how a flood damage reduction project would impact wildlife and habitat in and around the Rush River. Many felt the impact of a large project would not benefit property owners and they would lose wildlife habitat. Mr. Downs explained the Corps of Engineers, as a cooperating agency, has a permitting procedure that encourages off-channel alternatives which are more environmentally friendly. Mr. Downs reminded meeting participants that solutions need to be practical. Mr. Opat said solutions could consist of a series of smaller projects as opposed to one large project.

Brief discussion was held on the railroad bridge north of the City of Amenia. Water follows the railroad bridge and runs into the northern part of the city. It was thought a 3 to 4 foot dike would protect the city from overland flooding. Someone asked if the railroad would ever consider removing the bridge. Mr. Downs stated it was highly unlikely the railroad would invest the kind of money it would take to remove / relocate the bridge.

Someone suggested putting a dike on the southern bank of the Rush River, a mile from the section line by the cemetery. The City of Amenia discussed constructing a dike 4 to 5 years ago and hired Moore Engineering, Inc. to do a feasibility study.

Jason Benson reminded everyone the FEMA flood insurance maps will be released sometime in February 2016. He said to keep in mind that a 3 to 4 foot dike may not protect the city from a 100-year flood event. Mr. Downs recommended a member of the city council be added to the Rush River Watershed Planning Team.

Someone suggested early drainage be considered for flood damage reduction. He stated the earlier the water can move in the spring, the less of a problem it becomes. He suggested moving the snow and opening the ditches as soon as possible before the water begins to pool.

Adjournment

There being no further business to be considered by the Board, the meeting adjourned without objection.

APPROVED:

Mark Brodshaug
Chairman

ATTEST:

Carol Harbeke Lewis
Secretary-Treasurer